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ABSTRACT

Through a program called the Minority Male Afterschool Program (MMAP), college students at Mississippi Valley State University in Itta Bena (Mississippi) are working one-on-one with high school students. The MMAP is an enrichment program that encourages at-risk African American students aged 12 to 19 to complete high school and pursue postsecondary training and schooling. The MMAP serves about 100 students annually from 3 schools in the Mississippi delta where the average income is about one-third the national average. The primary program activity is providing mentoring and tutoring. College students spend 5 to 10 hours a week in their assigned schools working one-on-one, helping teachers, or meeting with groups of students. Mentors and tutors receive training in program goals and objectives. Schools in the Mississippi Delta face high obstacles with few resources, notably a low level of educational expenditures. The MMAP provides services that help counter the lack of resources and parent participation in Delta schools. The operation of the program in each of three schools and the role of Mississippi Valley State University in the MMAP are described. Profiles of some of the student and mentor participants show the positive impacts of the MMAP. The basic structure of the program can be exported to other schools and communities. Role model programs increase opportunities for at-risk students. (SLD)

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ED 405 409

Minority Male Afterschool Program

by Herbert F. Dalton, Jr.

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ABOUT THE PLAN

Plan for Social Excellence, Inc. is a not-for-profit organization that utilizes private funds to create or support innovative pilot projects in education in the United States.

The Plan supports programs that are fluid and responsive to the needs of individual schools and communities rather than programs that attempt to address these needs through a system-wide process of reform. This approach allows the Plan and its program participants to circumvent over-burdened school bureaucracies in order to attack the roots of problems that prevent students from succeeding or excelling in their studies.

This "grassroots" approach to educational enrichment and reform is part of a growing trend among educators, community leaders, and parents, many of whom have been frustrated by a lack of opportunities for initiatives at the local level. This local emphasis ensures that the reform measures are appropriate to the populations and circumstances in which they are developed, and that these programs benefit the school, the district and the community in significant and lasting ways.

Minority Male Afterschool Program

By Herbert F. Dalton, Jr.

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INTRODUCTION

With 300 African-American high school students hanging on his every word, the Rev. Roderick Mitchell, a minister from Cleveland, Mississippi, turned the story of a simple errand into an inspirational message.

Mitchell's story began with his trip into town one day to buy ice cream. Did you know, he asked the crowd, that Augustus Jackson — a black man — invented ice cream? Did you know, he asked, that Robert Collum — a black man — invented the calculator used to tally the price? Did you know that Benjamin Crenshaw — a black man — invented the machine that makes the paper bags the ice cream was put in? As his story continued, Mitchell stopped to make a telephone call and then drove home. Did you know, he asked again, that Robert John — a black man — invented the telephone receiver for Alexander Graham Bell? Did you know, he asked, that Garret Morgan — a black man — invented the first traffic light?

If they can succeed, urged Mitchell, so can you.

"You want to rise above other's expectations of you," Mitchell said. "You don't let race or anything else stop you from becoming who you can become. Because you can be somebody. You can really excel. You can break the cycle. It's going to take some work. But you can do it."

Breaking the cycle. It was a message repeated over and over again to the 300 students attending this conference, held at Mississippi Valley State University in Itta Bena. These students, who live in the economically depressed Mississippi Delta, are caught in a cycle of drugs and gangs and teenage pregnancy.

But it takes more than words to help these students break this cycle. Through a program called the Minority Male Afterschool

"Through a program called the Minority Male Afterschool Program (MMAP), college students at Mississippi Valley are working one-on-one with high school students."

Program (MMAP), college students at Mississippi Valley are working one-on-one with high school students — tutoring them, mentoring them, counseling them, helping them get better grades, apply to college, aspire to well-paying careers.

In the last three years, MMAP has helped dozens of students understand the importance of getting an education. In the words of one college tutor, "The decisions you make today speak for your future."

Minority Male Afterschool Program Fact Sheet (fall 95)

*87+ participants (+ 282 middle & elementary school students)
*Participant gender: 80% male, 20% female
*Number of mentors and tutors: 31
*50:50 male:female ratio among tutors/mentors
*$57,000. annual budget
*3 schools

PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

The Minority Male Afterschool Program at Mississippi Valley State University (MVSU) is an enrichment program that encourages at-risk African-American young men and women, ages 12 to 19, to complete high school and pursue post-secondary training and schooling. Supported by Plan for Social Excellence, MMAP began in January 1993 and serves about 100 students annually from Leflore County's three high schools: Greenwood, Amanda Elzy and Leflore County.

MMAP's primary activity is providing mentoring and tutoring in all academic areas for at-risk students. Students from Mississippi Valley State University spend five to 10 hours a week in their assigned schools, working one-on-one with several high school students, helping the teacher in the classroom, or meeting with groups of students. They determine the progress of the students, help them solve difficult situations and offer words of encouragement. They teach test-taking skills and help students prepare for exams. Each high school has a designated spot where the tutoring takes place. Assistance has been provided in a wide range of academic subject areas — algebra, English, geometry, physics, chemistry, life sciences, history.

"MMAP's goals are to help the minority male student raise his level of self-awareness, develop self-esteem, enhance his educational attainment and learn ways to cope in today's society."

The tutors also assume the role of mentor and even amateur psychologist. They listen to the students' problems — problems in school, at home, on the streets — and try to give them reassurance and advice.

Mentors and tutors attend training sessions on how to communicate with high school students and how to help students develop time-management and study skills. Other workshops advise the tutors on ways to establish rapport with the younger students. Tutors get a handbook that explains their duties and outlines what is expected of them. Most tutors start in their sophomore year and continue until they graduate.

MMAP's goals are to "help the minority male student raise his level of self-awareness, develop self-esteem, enhance his educational attainment and learn ways to cope in today's society." The program encourages participants to complete high school and enter a post-secondary institution, vocational school or the armed forces, and provides a supportive network that will assist minority males in their goal accomplishments.

MMAP is housed in the Counseling Center's Academic Skills Parlor on the Mississippi Valley campus in Itta Bena, a town of 1,600 that sits between Jackson, Mississippi, and Memphis, Tennessee.

The program also sponsors other activities to raise educational aspirations. In April 1995, MMAP hosted a conference, "Breaking the Cycle," for African-American males. Nearly 300 students from nine schools in the Mississippi Delta heard motivational speakers discuss education, employment and social change. The high school students were joined by college students, staff from community agencies, college personnel and representatives from the religious community to explore issues faced by minority males.

MMAP offers ACT workshops, and each fall program participants are invited to Mississippi Valley State University for the Saturday of Homecoming. Tutors and mentors occasionally provide special outings for participants, such as pick-up basketball games at the schools. In the summer, MMAP provides tutors for Greenwood High School's summer program and teaches math and computer science to fourth through twelfth graders in a program called Children Learning in Progress.

"MMAP is housed in the Counseling Center's Academic Skills Parlor on the Mississippi Valley campus in Itta Bena."

The program's primary admission criteria is to be an African-American male, although many female students have participated. Those students who need extra educational motivation receive first priority. High school guidance counselors select the students for the program.

In selecting the tutors and mentors, program coordinators look at the college students' academic achievement and assess their ability to maintain a level of self-respect.

MMAP has these nine written objectives:

- Fifty percent of the program participants will be enrolled in college preparatory courses.
- The school drop-out rate for students enrolled in the program will be reduced by fifty percent.
- To provide free ACT workshops to all students at the three participating schools to assist them in increasing their ACT scores.
- To increase the number of minority males enrolled in Math and Science courses and design an institute to assist them in improving their skills and abilities.
- To increase the number of minority males entering college upon completion of high school by fifty percent.
- To have program participants possess a more mature outlook on the selection of career choices and increased knowledge on which to base career decisions.
- Teachers and human service workers will possess the necessary skills needed to work with minority male students suffering from lack of motivation and low self-esteem.
- To provide single parent mothers with the necessary skills and techniques needed for raising an adolescent male in the absence of a father.
- To implement a mentor program involving businesses, community leaders, and the students of Mississippi Valley State University which goal is to provide guidance and role-making to the program participants.

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PROGRAM PERSONNEL

Program founder and project director Jennifer Beane directs the Career Development & Placement Center at Mississippi Valley State University. Beane has lived in Mississippi the last 10 years and has worked at MVSU since 1989. Beane oversees the MMAP's planning, budgeting, staffing and evaluation.

Wendell Powell is MMAP's only full-time employee. As program assistant, Powell oversees the mentors, manages day-to-day operations and supervises staff. Powell also serves as a de facto mentor for several young males who participate in the program.

This program has three case managers who serve as full-time guidance counselors at the MMAP high schools: Marlene Johnson at Amanda Elzy High School, Mildred Sias at Greenwood High School and Mildred Wilson at Leflore County High School. The case managers assign students to tutors and mentors.

The program is also staffed by 34 Mississippi Valley students who mentor and tutor in the high schools. While 10 mentors receive financial aid for their community service, the rest are funded through the Plan grant.

BACKGROUND

Jennifer Beane conceived the idea for MMAP after attending a conference on African-American males sponsored by the American Counseling Association in Cincinnati in 1990.

Beane realized that college attendance rates among African-American males will not rise until fundamental problems are addressed — lack of motivation, peer pressure, gang violence, lack of parental involvement and lack of knowledge about financial aid and the college admission process. Beane thought that a mentoring program would help students overcome some of these problems.

In the spring of 1992, Mississippi Valley State entered into a partnership with Greenwood High School as one of eight school-college collaboratives funded by the Jessie Ball duPont Fund, known as Partners for Educational Excellence. Beane served as the Greenwood-Mississippi Valley State liaison and at a Partners planning workshop she met Mario Peña, executive director of Plan for Social Excellence and a workshop presenter.

Beane discussed her vision for the MMAP with Peña, who invited her to submit a proposal to the Plan, which she did in December of 1992. Peña remembers the proposal. "It was compelling. The proposal recognized the male need. It saw this not as the white man's burden, but that blacks could make a difference."

" In January 1993, the MMAP began with a three-year commitment from the Plan."

Plan for Social Excellence approved Beane's proposal. In January 1993, the MMAP began with a three-year commitment from the Plan.

THE LOCAL ENVIRONMENTAL CONTEXT

The cotton fields of the Mississippi Delta, flat and lushly green, stretch endlessly into the horizon.

Route 82 cuts across the northern third of Mississippi, a two-lane highway that travels from the meandering Mississippi through these cotton fields and then past strip malls filled with national chains, fast food joints and discount stores. Large 18-wheelers lumber through on their way to Interstate 55.

The side roads that leave Route 82 wind through miles of cotton fields, the flat landscape broken only by huge tractors, expensive mechanical giants. Occasional clusters of unpainted wooden shacks hug the roadside. Some are abandoned, once housing for plantation workers. Others are occupied, with little kids playing hide-and-seek in the weeds and amongst the run-down cars and broken-down furniture in the front yards. Churches are scattered throughout many of these roads.

A six-county area east of the Mississippi River, the Mississippi Delta suffers from an uneven distribution of wealth, a racial caste system and an economy that is anachronistically dependent on agriculture. This setting defines the needs and obstacles of the schools in the Delta and frames the context of the Minority Male Afterschool Program.

"A six-county area east of the Mississippi River, the Mississippi Delta suffers from an uneven distribution of wealth, a racial caste system and an economy that is anachronistically dependent on agriculture."

The average income for a Delta resident is about one-third the national average. The 1990 per capita income in the United States was $18,896, in Mississippi $12,830, and in the Delta $6,584. The Delta's per capita income works out to $3.16 an hour based on a 40-hour week — significantly less than the federal minimum wage.

With such pervasive poverty, Mississippi has the highest percentage of its population in the country receiving public aid (11.1 percent) and food stamps (18.7 percent), according to the U.S. Census

Bureau. Thirty-four percent of Mississippi's children live at or below the poverty line as defined by the federal government, according to the Center for the Study of Social Policy.

Poverty in the Delta is unevenly distributed. A small group of powerful whites controls the region's economy and resources. Carey Spears, Greenwood High School principal and known as "Coach" throughout the district, estimates that 10 whites own 70 percent of the land in Leflore County. Quentella Sullivan, who teaches English at Amanda Elzy High School, says, "There's poor people and there's black people. The black people are even poorer."

The Delta, according to the Plan's executive director Mario Peña, is a land "devoid of hope. People know they're bad off but don't know how bad off."

Research has indicated that there is a link between poverty and at-risk students and perhaps an at-risk educational system. What we see in the Delta supports these findings.

"The challenge is the under-educated family, not bad kids," says Spears. "If we can just get these students to graduate, they'll be the first in their families to do so."

Plantations, and the life they represent, dominate the socio-economic structure of the Delta. Plantations are mentioned repeatedly in discussions with educators. Leflore principal Charles Scott calls this mindset a "plantation mentality."

"I grew up on a plantation," says Scott. "We raised cotton and soybeans. We had 15 to 20 families, each with six or seven children. There were 16 kids in my family. Employees were paid a wage between 50 cents and $3 a day. My dad was the overseer, so he made $5 a day. The plantation owner had a commissary. You charged everything. At the end of the year, you paid for what you owed. If you were from Jim Baker's plantation, the doctor took care of you. He sent the bill to Mr. B. If you weren't from a plantation, you didn't even bother going to the doctor 'cause you couldn't afford it.

"The challenge is the under-educated family, not bad kids," says Spears.

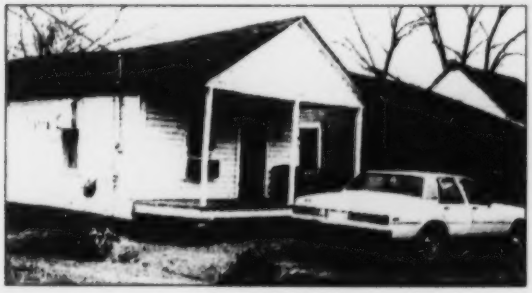
"When the bus stopped at the plantation, seventy kids got on to go to school. We were on split sessions. We'd go to school in July and August — take September and October off. During cotton time, only one kid got on the bus — me!

"It takes a whole village to raise a child. That's how we lived."

The breakup of the plantation destroyed the anchor many Delta families needed for survival. Today, many Delta families are unsure

where to turn. There's no one to protect them. The social order has changed and they aren't sure what to replace it with.

Carey Spears says, "The cotton industry's changed. Machinery has taken over. There's no use for mass labor that was part of the plantation. Housing is no longer provided. Now folks aren't sure what to do or even how to survive."



This uncertainty, coupled with the area's isolation and poverty, appears to have contributed to the malaise that has settled upon Delta residents. One teacher estimates that 90 percent of her students have never been out of Leflore County.

Leflore assistant principal Charles Ollie says, "I was reared on a plantation, we looked forward to a better day. Our motivation came from within. We had a great deal of respect. I've seen a complete turnabout. Students today are not amenable to authority; kids don't have to work. The attitude is completely different."

The impact of the plantations and their racial divisions still linger. Socially, whites and blacks do not mix. Blacks and whites typically eat in different restaurants, often shop in different stores, go to different schools. White students attend private schools, many of them Christian academies, and black students attend public schools. The educational system is separate, and not equal.

Even within the black community there are divisions. Explains one teacher, "Some blacks who are able to cope with changes in the social and economic order are ashamed of other black people they see. They're ashamed of other black people they see and feel guilty because they're not doing anything about it."

"At 16, you're either kicked out of school or a dropout. At 18, you're incarcerated, and at 21 you're depending on welfare."

Youth Culture: Gangs, Drugs, Pregnancy

The African-American male has been described as an endangered species in today's society, says Jennifer Beane. They are more likely to be retained, suspended or expelled from school, to drop out of school, to be a victim of or in black-on-black crime, to be unemployed or under employed. These situations can cause African-American males to reject their responsibilities as citizens, fathers and husbands, says Beane.

Marzelle Wallace, student government president at Mississippi Valley in 1994-95, defines the typical Mississippi Delta at-risk student this way. "At 16, you're either kicked out of school or a dropout. At 18,

you're incarcerated, and at 21 you're depending on welfare. You have to say, 'I'm not that person,' but you are that person."

There is a lethal combination of minimal family support and heavy peer pressure. Students feel pressure from their friends to act up and be class clowns. There is a lack of leadership in the home and community to counteract this pressure. Students aren't serious about learning. They still feel that education is not important.

Students in the Delta react to this environment by developing a culture dependent on gangs, drugs and pregnancy. These corrosive forces pervade the lives of MMAP participants.

"There's pressure to belong to the 'in crowd'," said Allen Mitchell, a twelfth grader. "There are people in school you fear because they just don't care. A lot of boys just 'hang' and do nothing with their lives."

Pregnancy

Girls as young as 11 have babies; there are 16-year-olds having their second child and 20-year-olds with five, six kids.

"There are more kids having babies now," said Wendell Powell.

Teen pregnancy condemns young women to a cycle of poverty and limited hope. Jennifer Beane says that the monthly check for a mother and one child is just $96 — it increases just $30 with a second child.

"We have to attack teenage pregnancy; to explain that it's okay to say 'no'," says Beane. "We have to get them to feel good if a young man drops them."

Some of these young mothers drop out, while others go to alternative schools. They hardly ever get married and their children rarely have a relationship with their father.

"I want more for myself than that. I need to get an education."

"There's lots of peer pressure to join gangs, do drugs, have sex. Many girls have babies and drop out. Women basically do what men tell them to do. I have a friend who's 16 with two babies. She had to drop out. I want more for myself than that. I need to get an education," says Latoya McClung, 15, a ninth grader who has spent two years in the program.

Gangs

Powell estimates that 80 percent of MMAP participants are gang members. "They are searching for love they don't have at home," he says. "Their parents spend no time with them, don't talk to them, don't check with them. The gang is their parenting."

In the gang culture, the white man is portrayed as keeping the black man from achieving. "The whole outlook of the gang is negative," Powell explains.

"Our kids have very low self-esteem," says Quentella Sullivan, Amanda Elzy English teacher. "That's why they're attracted to gangs."

"Gang members try to scare you into joining their gang — 11- and 12-year-olds are joining gangs," said Jarvis Sutherland, 14, an eighth grader who has spent two years in the program.

While schools prohibit their students from wearing gang colors, the kids figure out subtle ways to wear them — shoe laces, nail polish, rags stuffed in pockets.

Some students realize that to move forward they must avoid these negative forces.

Antonio's best friend died because of a bicycle his gang stole. To avoid pressure to join a gang, Antonio stays at home and away from the park.

This culture does not reward educational achievement. Low aspirations are common. Many of these students, who have no plans to leave the Delta, believe that getting an education is a worthless endeavor.

Says Mildred Wilson, Leflore guidance counselor, "Our kids are not motivated. At the honor assembly, several students didn't want their names called. They did not want to be recognized for honors."

Efforts to boost these students' self-esteem are needed. Rev. Mitchell says, "They need to be proud of their heritage, of the accomplishments their forefathers have made. The vicious cycle needs to be broken. Our children should not have to be on welfare."

" The vicious cycle needs to be broken. Our children should not have to be on welfare."

Drugs

The use of drugs is closely intertwined with the gang culture. Many gangs are involved in drug trafficking, Powell says.

"The majority of kids are smoking marijuana — maybe 75, 80 percent of the students. A few do cocaine. They just don't care — the drugs release them from a problem," he says. "There are more young people selling drugs today than in the 1970s and 1980s."

Kendrick Weathers, a ninth grader from Leflore County High School, believes that young African-American males in his community have no motivation to do anything but sell drugs.

"I've seen brothers turn against brothers because of drugs," says Powell.

SCHOOLS

Schools in the Mississippi Delta face huge obstacles with minuscule resources. In 1988, Mississippi's per pupil expenditure was $2,760 (only Alabama and Arkansas spent less), compared to a national average of $4,209. New York, for example, spent $6,864 per pupil.

This low level of education expenditures affects blacks and not whites. Although nearly half of Mississippi's residents are African American, they represent 98 percent of the public school enrollment.

Thirty-nine percent of Mississippi's residents do not have a high school diploma, according to the state Department of Education. About 400,000 Mississippi residents are illiterate; the state's drop-out rate is 37 percent. The drop-out rate in the Delta is 60 percent and is even higher for males.

Educators throughout Leflore County speak about the need to reach the whole family. But as Carey Spears says, "Parents don't come to school. You have to go out there and reach them. We've got to meet them on their own ground."

Mario Peña says, "You get money for educating kids. You get nothing for educating parents."

"The drop-out rate in the Delta is 60 percent and is even higher for males."

But parents show little interest in learning new skills. Wendell Powell says the program offered parenting workshops, but no one came.

Leflore County's three schools sit within this daunting educational setting, coping with severe poverty, limited financial support and minimal parental involvement. Each faces different but nonetheless overwhelming obstacles. Leflore County and Amanda Elzy high schools are both part of the Leflore County School District, overseen by the same central office, while Greenwood is the only high school in the Greenwood City Public School District.

Greenwood High School

A sprawling, suburban school, Greenwood High is surrounded by an active neighborhood of homes and stores. Of the three MMAP schools, Greenwood is the largest, with an enrollment of 1,004 students. Greenwood's MMAP participants all come from its Alternative School, which enrolls ninth and tenth graders who have repeated at least two grades.

By putting the "at risk" students in this program, more individual assistance is given to each student in every class. Teachers in this program are more familiar with the needs and culture of at-risk students.

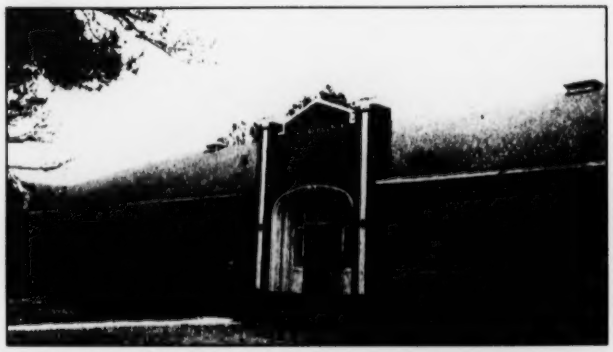
The MMAP is well organized at Greenwood, with a written schedule and consistent attendance by tutors and mentors. The students involved report that the program is helpful to them. They praise their teachers for sincerely caring about their well-being and education.

The drop-out rate for Greenwood High is 33 percent, compared to 65 percent for the Alternative School. The percentage of students attending two-year colleges is 30 and four-year colleges 40, an overall college-going rate seven times that of the Alternative School.

GREENWOOD HIGH SCHOOL ALTERNATIVE HIGH SCHOOL

Total Enrollment:	85
MMAP Enrollment:	39
Drop-out Rate:	65%
Cost per Student:	$4,111
Student Ethnic Breakdown:	92% African American, 8% Caucasian
Faculty Ethnic Breakdown:	50% African American, 50% Caucasian
Percent of grads at 2-yr. college:	7
Percent of grads at 4-yr. college:	3
Percent of students below poverty line:	85
Percent female MMAP participants:	26
Percent student from single parent homes:	85

Leflore County High School



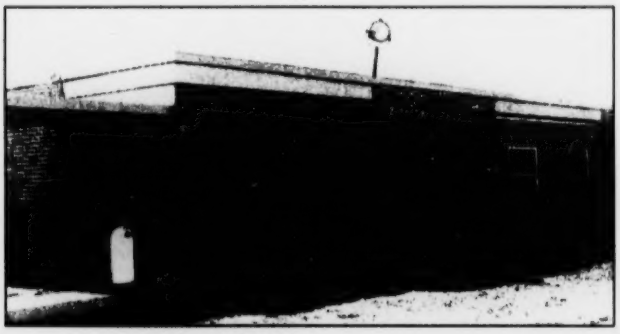
Leflore County High School is in an old two-story building, with high ceilings and wide hallways. While the building is well-kept, Leflore is a troubled school — it was placed on probation last year because of low performance on standardized achievement tests. The college-going rate at Leflore is 25 percent, by far the lowest of the three schools. Compared to students at the other schools, students at Leflore appeared most at-risk, receiving little parental support and experiencing more difficulty with gangs and drugs.

One tutor says, "Leflore kids aren't used to authority. Kids need more connecting. I see kids at Leflore walk the halls all day."

Leflore's MMAP program also involves 123 elementary school students, in grades 4-6, who meet occasionally with mentors. These mentors counsel the elementary school students, assist them with schoolwork and answer questions about college and careers.

LEFLORE COUNTY HIGH SCHOOL

Enrollment:	549
MMAP Enrollment:	36 (plus 123 elementary school)
Drop-out Rate:	48%
Cost per Student:	$4,267.
Student Ethnic Breakdown:	99% African American, 1% Caucasian
Faculty Ethnic Breakdown:	60% African American, 40% Caucasian
Percent of grads at 2-yr. college:	5
Percent of grads at 4-yr. college:	20
Percent of students below poverty line:	97
Percent female MMAP participants:	11
Percent students from single parent homes:	90
Percent students enrolled in college prep:	10



Amanda Elzy High School

Amanda Elzy is located in a deserted stretch of countryside, in a modern, clean building. While Amanda Elzy is Leflore County High School's hypothetical bookend, in many ways it is its antithesis. Despite the same per pupil expenditure, Leflore sends about 25 percent of its students to college and Amanda Elzy 66 percent, and Leflore acknowledges a drop-out rate of 48 percent, much higher than Amanda Elzy's 30 percent.

Principal Tommy Spells says the reason for Amanda Elzy's success is "We have a clean, safe school."

Students at Amanda Elzy overwhelmingly feel that their teachers are interested in them and make every possible effort to ensure their success. Students seemed to have healthy self-esteem and confidence in their school work, and teachers take pride in the accomplishments of the students.

Quentella Sullivan, Middle School English teacher, says, "I just care. I've always visited my kids' homes. That gives me empathy. When I see them, I acknowledge my kids' parents."

Amanda Elzy students face many of the same challenges as do other students throughout Leflore County. They spoke of peer pressure, gangs, and drugs. But they seem to get more parental support than did students at the other two schools.

Not counting the 159 middle school students, Amanda Elzy has the smallest number of MMAP participants in the program.

AMANDA ELZY HIGH SCHOOL

Enrollment:	703
MMAP Enrollment:	12 (plus 159 middle school students)
Drop-out Rate:	30%
Cost per student:	$4,267. (Leflore County Schools)
Student Ethnic Breakdown:	94% black, 1% Caucasian
Faculty Ethnic Breakdown:	80% African American, 20% Caucasian
Percent of grads at 2-yr. colleges:	18
Percent of grads at 4-year colleges:	48
Percent of students below poverty line:	92
Percent female MMAP participants:	29
Percent MMAP participants from single parent homes:	90
Percent students enrolled in college prep:	44

Mississippi Valley State University

Mississippi Valley State University is like an oasis in the Mississippi Delta. Surrounded by acres of flat cotton fields, the campus is a sprawling complex of low brick buildings and a prominent football stadium — once home of Jerry Rice, now the leading touchdown scorer in the NFL. An air of optimism pervades the campus — this college is a place where students believe their dreams can come true.

Mississippi Valley State University opened its doors in 1950 with 14 students as Mississippi Vocational College. In 1974, Valley gained university status and adopted its current name. This fall, Mississippi Valley enrolled 2,153 students in 26 undergraduate and two graduate programs. Most students are from the predominately black Mississippi Delta region. There are no white faces on campus.

William W. Sutton, the University's fourth president, took office in 1988. A biologist, Sutton taught at Howard and Dillard universities and served as an administrator at Kansas City and Chicago State universities before coming to Mississippi. He's proud of his humble background: "Neither one of my parents finished middle school. Principals and teachers in school made us believe we could survive anywhere."

Sutton says that when he took over the reins, the University was burdened with debt: "We had a $13.2 million financial aid liability with the United States Department of Education, and we owed money to the local utility company. Half of the checks I wrote bounced.

"Now," he says, "the new head of the utility company sits on our board. He's one of our biggest supporters."

One of MVSU's six goals is "Be service oriented and responsive to the educational and cultural needs of the community." Sutton describes what the University means to the Delta: "We have to save these people; these people need education.

"Even if they stay one year, there's value added. If a woman stays two years, we won't see her on welfare. We give them something they can take home — they aren't in jail, they aren't on welfare, they're productive citizens.

"The Delta would be void of places for inspirational education without us. You can come from where these people come from and feel comfortable here. We generate a self-worth, a self-confidence here. Here you're as good as anybody."

"We generate a self-worth, a self-confidence here. Here you're as good as anybody."

PEOPLE: MMAP Leaders, Role Models, Students

Wendell Powell rides the bus 120 miles round-trip from Greenville each day to oversee MMAP, a dedication shared by many of the administrators, mentors, tutors and students.

Powell, a former football player, relates well to the students he oversees. He makes a point of learning the students' names, greeting them with high-fives and enthusiasm. His own past is filled with drugs and crime.

"I've been a thief. I used to do drugs. I was one of the best thieves in Greenville. I could've been dead," he tells a small group of college students involved in the program. "A few times I went to jail and stayed overnight. That was enough for me. I was in three times. Once for stealing; twice for fighting."

A minister, Powell fills his speech with Biblical references. He sends an empowering message to the high school and college students in the program.

"If you work for it, nobody's going to take it from you," he says.

"The college students must write essays explaining why they want to be part of this program."

Jennifer Beane is soft-spoken, but her forceful personality and large heart soon emerge. Her dedication to the program is sincere — she frequently returns to her office after hours to work on the program. "We've got to care about the kids," she says often.

At the beginning of the year, Powell prepares the MMAP's 34 mentors and tutors for their assignments. "You need to talk to the students about sex, drugs, alcohol, gangs, peer pressure. If you have problems with the teachers, call me.

"When kids misbehave, I say: 'People expect you to behave like that. Show them that you're going to learn something.' Make students understand that you're there to help them."

The college students must write essays explaining why they want to be part of this program. Powell interviews all the applicants.

"I try to select students who have an idea about the streets," Powell says. "They are here in college, they are trying to succeed, but they know what it was like to grow up in impoverished neighborhoods. They have a taste for that life, so they are better able to relate to the high school students."

Powell works hard to mold these college students into good role models for the high school students, in hopes of filling a gap in these younger students' lives.

"In this community, we don't have good African-American role models," explains Helen Clark, a teacher at Greenwood's Alternative School. Guidance counselor Mildred Sias agrees: "Our boys don't have positive role models to change their behavior. That's what they need."

Even the high school students know the important role these tutors play. One student tells us: "I needed a role model; he was a friend and a tutor at the same time. It's a motivation thing. It gets you started."

In addition to providing academic help, tutors spend considerable time talking with students about life issues and providing other incentives.

"This program helps kids; they need someone to talk with. You could see the expression on their faces; the counseling part was most powerful," says Carl Robinson, one of the original MMAP tutors. Carl worked as a tutor for almost three years, until he graduated last year.

Carl sponsored pizza parties for kids and gave his students monetary incentives for grades. "I gave them $3 for an A, $2 for a B, $1 for a C. I had 25 kids. One slow kid, I told him just to get a C."

"Our boys don't have positive role models to change their behavior. That's what they need."

A football player at Valley, Carl was injured his senior year and couldn't play. "After I got my cast off, I'd show up in the park and play basketball. When a kid was acting like the class clown, I went to his mom's house and told her. He calmed down. He went back to his original self.

"On weekends, I opened up the gym at Greenwood or Elzy. But they had to talk about drugs and sex first. They had to give me their opinions. My friends would come with me."

Carl's impact was enormous.

Patricia Collins, an English teacher at Amanda Elzy, says, "Carl always came with a suit and tie. If they knew Carl was coming, they

would dress differently. They were so disappointed when he didn't come. They tried to emulate him. He was a very positive influence. We miss him."

Quentella Sullivan, who also teaches English at Amanda Elzy, talks about another tutor, John Randolph. "Mr. Randolph is 26 years old. He worked with five or six of our boys on Mondays and Wednesdays. As the year progressed, more kids asked for his help. He talked about wearing your clothes respectfully. The boys pull their pants up when they come to my class because of Mr. Randolph. They're more attentive in class. Some are getting B's."

In written evaluations, students gave the tutors and mentors high marks. The tutors and mentors, say the high school students, were prepared, punctual, good communicators. "Having these tutors has been an asset to our school," wrote one student.

Perhaps the best way to appreciate the program's impact is to listen to the comments of three college students who served as tutors and mentors in the program.

Tamara Dodd grew up near Jackson, Mississippi. She is now a senior at Mississippi Valley State University, majoring in political science.

"I've always believed in giving back to the community. Public service is something I aspire to. This was a good opportunity to help my community and to get paid for it," Tamara says.

Tamara worked three semesters for MMAP. She went to both Amanda Elzy and Greenwood high schools to help students prepare for the ACT. She also tutored English to students at Leflore County and Greenwood high schools. She spends about five hours a week tutoring, working at the high schools on Tuesdays and Thursdays seeing between five and 10 students each day.

"Some students don't come in for tutoring, they just want to come in to talk."

Sometimes they discuss the work being covered in the classroom. She helps them work on their language usage, particularly in essay writing. "I sit there and try to correct them when things are said wrong. I go through their papers, and try to evaluate their work and see if we can't bring it to a better level."

But most of her time is spent counseling the students.

"Some students don't come in for tutoring, they just want to come in to talk," she said. "They want someone to listen to them. I feel like a lot of these students have no one to talk to."

She also tries to motivate the students to expect more of themselves and their work.

"I try to give the students motivational skills. A lot of the students feel like they are not going to make a mark in society. They don't feel like they have the capabilities to achieve. I tell them that it is important that they succeed, and anything that hinders their success, they need to stay away from. I try to give them advice on how to be self-starters and motivate themselves. I try hard to instill in them, if they want to be successful, they must push and motivate themselves."

Tamara plans to attend a master's program in business administration next year and hopes to go to law school. She also hopes to continue mentoring. "It's motivated me to want to go back into the community and really try hard to bring some type of program that can help these students succeed," she said. "Minority Male has made me realize that there are people out there who are truly suffering and just need someone to listen to. I like being that ear, that sounding board that they need."

Marzelle Wallace graduated from Mississippi Valley State University last year, and now works for the federal government in Panama City, Florida. He grew up in Mobile, Alabama. Marzelle was a tutor in MMAP for two years, working at Leflore County and Greenwood high schools.

"It wasn't really a financial thing for me," he said. "I was giving back something someone once gave to me. It provided me an opportunity to help someone, the way someone helped me."

Like Tamara, Marzelle assisted the high school students with academics and counseled them on their problems. He met with them both one-on-one and in groups.

"I showed the kids how to study, how to look things up," he said. "We would look at vocabulary words, and I would explain how if you break them down you can find two words that sum up everything. I told them that history was made up of places, people and time, and if they remember who it happened to, where and when, they would be fine. I told them that in math, the examples on the board in school and in homework are the same, just changing the numbers."

"It provided me an opportunity to help someone, the way someone helped me."

He continued, "Some of my students' grades increased. But the main thing was, they were no longer a statistic. They began to think about their actions."

For example, Marzelle tried to show the students that while they thought using profanity was "cool," all it really showed was that they have a limited vocabulary.

"They had no one to back them, no one in their family to motivate them. No one believed in them. They had money problems, but their biggest problem was their sense of loneliness. They did a lot of things just to get attention."

Some of the students Marzelle met with were girls, 15-year-olds with two kids. One of the first things he had to do with many of the female students was convince them that they could have a platonic relationship.

"When they saw a male, the first thing they would do was flirt," he said, still expressing amazement about their attitude. "I had to tell myself, 'you are here to do a job.' I had to tell them —' your relationship with men doesn't always have to be sexual.'"

"I was getting paid to help them, and the pay was not very much. I had to go beyond the call of duty. My paycheck was seeing a child get higher grades. My paycheck was seeing that he wasn't getting called to the principal's office. My paycheck was seeing the kids try. They just needed someone to believe in them and push them."

Marzelle had many ideas for improving the program. "I would start at an earlier age," he began. "I would extend the tutoring and mentoring periods, create some extracurricular activities. Some of these kids have never been to the movies, the theater, a real park. I would provide them with the opportunity to do those things. I would have liked to have spent more time with the kids, gotten more involved in their family life."

Marzelle said he benefited from being a role model in MMAP. "These kids were just a few years younger than me, and they called me Mr. Wallace. They gave me a sense of respect for myself. I realized, if someone is watching me, I should demonstrate a correct example. How could I tell them to get good grades if I wasn't getting good grades? How could I tell them to go to class if I wasn't going to class? Being a mentor helped keep me on top of things."

Marzelle now mentors students at an elementary school in Florida.

Derrick Smith is a senior majoring in computer science at Mississippi Valley. Originally from Illinois, he worked for one semester as a tutor at Leflore County High School. He met with a group of seven seventh-and eighth-grade boys every morning for an hour, some-

times helping them with their homework, but more often just talking to them about their problems and concerns.

"We just sat around and talked. Every day we talked about different subjects — sex, sports, school. They were young kids, they wanted to know things. They started looking at me as a big brother."

Derrick tried to focus their attention on the importance of getting an education. "They weren't really interested in college when I first met them, but then they wanted to talk about it. They all told me they wanted to go into the army. I tried to persuade them to think about college," he said. "I tried to get them back on the right track schoolwise. They weren't bad kids. None of them were dumb. They just had trouble applying themselves."

One approach Derrick took was describing his high school years. "I told them about my background. I was the class clown. Sometimes I needed to let off steam. But I also talked about my accomplishments — that I was popular in school and on the honor roll, that I played for the basketball team."

Even though Derrick is not a tutor this semester, he still keeps in touch with some of the students. "If I could help one or two of them, then I did my job," he said. "And I think I touched a couple of them."

Students

"At first, kids were reluctant to get a tutor," said Wendell Powell. "Now, they look forward to it. I don't see big changes but the kids are enthused. The word has caught on, 'I need a tutor.' If you could just see where they come from — they're doing great considering."

Here are profiles of MMAP students who, although unique, face challenges and express perspectives that are common to many Delta students.

"At first, kids were reluctant to get a tutor," said Wendell Powell.

Tony, a 14-year-old who is repeating the seventh grade, has been in the program two years. Tony meets daily with his tutor, Derrick, which he enjoys. Failing three subjects, Tony says he is trying to improve his grades with Derrick's help.

Tony gets in trouble for playing, fighting and being disrespectful to teachers. He tried football, but quit after three games because he "just didn't want to play anymore." He talks about a problem with reading and expresses frustration because teachers do not try to help him. He says if a teacher cares he or she will talk to you and help you. He feels most of his teachers make kids feel bad about themselves.

Tony lives with his mother and father, 15-year-old sister Danielle and a younger brother and sister. Danielle, also a seventh grader, has a baby and was recently expelled for bringing a knife to school.

College is not part of Tony's vision of his future. While he says he wants to get a job, he says most young black men just hang out and sell drugs.

Shanikke is a 14-year-old ninth grader. Shanikke sees her mentor, Romanda, on Tuesdays and Fridays. "She talks to me about my behavior and how to act in class. She's trying to help me with my attitude."

Shanikke lives with her mother and stepfather, younger brother and sister. Her mother doesn't know how much trouble she gets in at school. Teachers spend more time disciplining students than teaching them, she says. Some teachers and administrators curse the students and do not care at all.

Shanikke talks about the prevalence of girls having babies. "Some have them at 14 or 15, but most wait until the right time — eleventh or twelfth grade." While drugs are a problem, gangs are worse, she says. She hopes to get out of high school and go to school to become a mechanic.

Antonio Williams is a 15-year-old ninth grader who has been in the program for three years. Marzelle, who was Antonio's mentor for two years, graduated in June, so Antonio is now working with Wendell Powell. He's passing all but one subject.

Antonio lives with his mother and stepfather. His brother, who one teacher described as "brilliant," dropped out of school. His sister, also a dropout, has a small baby and is in an abusive relationship.

"Having a mentor has helped me feel better about myself and not worry about what other people think of me."

Drugs and gangs are a problem in school and the community, he says. "Lots of 17- and 18-year-old black men sell drugs."

Four years ago, Antonio was involved in a gang with his best friend, Shenika. While riding a bike stolen by gang members, Shenika was hit and killed by an 18-wheeler truck. That incident changed Antonio's life. Two years ago, Antonio often skipped school, talked back, once even threatened to "get" a teacher. He felt depressed, afraid that he had no friends and that his mother didn't love him anymore. His grandmother had recently died. He tried to cut his wrist.

Antonio feels MMAP has made real difference.

"Having a mentor has helped me feel better about myself and not worry about what other people think of me. A lot of my teachers

still care about me and check on me because they know I am smart. Teachers who care repeat instructions, help when you ask them to. If I had not gotten help from the program, I would probably drop out and would have tried to kill myself again. But my mentor (Marzelle) helped me understand that I am smart and I can do something. I want to go to college and be an engineer. I don't want to drop out like my brother and sister did. Now I know I will make something of my life."

Antonio avoids peer pressure by staying home and away from gangs and the park. He has resisted the pressure to join a gang. He and his cousin challenge each other to make the highest grades.

Antonio's English teacher, Ms. Hall, says he is very bright but has a problem with attendance. After doing well on his report card, Antonio asked, "Ms. Hall, can I have a hug? I did well."

Floyd Reed, 15, is in ninth grade and sees his mentor, Derrick, daily. He lives with his mother and stepfather. "Derrick wants me to make higher than just a C, but right now I'm not passing everything. I would like to go to college." Floyd's guidance counselor reports, "Because of Derrick, Floyd is a different kid this year."

A POSITIVE IMPACT

The Minority Male Afterschool Program is making a difference in the lives of its participants despite the overwhelming odds.

Evidence of the program's success abounds: students show evidence of increasing self-esteem, greater self-awareness and enhanced academic attainment.

"I've seen some kids really improve in both attitude and ability through the program," says Jimmy Tollos, Jr., a teacher in the Greenwood High School alternative program.

"Derrick motivated me to try and bring my grades up," said Kendrick Weathers, 15, a ninth grader. Weathers feels that seeing Derrick has moderated his behavior problems. "Derrick tells us to be our own man and not worry about what others think about what you are doing as long as you know it's right."

Student comments are enlightening and encouraging. "It helped me out with grades," says one student. Echoed another, "My grades improved. I was failing math, but I ended up passing."

"Evidence of the program's success abounds: students show evidence of increasing self-esteem, greater self-awareness and enhanced academic attainment."

"I was at the point that I wanted to drop out of school. People told me I was dumb, then I got a tutor and my grades came up. I said to myself, I have potential," reports a third.

"I changed a whole lot," another student says. "Miguel talked me out of dropping out of school."

Phalisha Walker said, "I look forward to seeing my tutor each week. I like getting out of class to see her."

Debra Sample says that kids acting up in class and teachers spending time on discipline keep her from learning at times. "I can go to my tutor when something comes up that I don't understand and she can help me with it."

Danny says, "The program is helping me stay focused. I need to get my education and my tutor can help me get there."

The program has also opened students' eyes to the importance of role models.

"Having a mentor gave me a man to talk to," said Allen Mitchell, a high school senior who plays football and runs track. "My dad hasn't always been in my life. I needed someone to talk things through with. My mentor gives me good ideas and shares his own experiences with me. I learned how important it is to be my own man."

Mitchell and Latoya McClung both said they are trying to be good role models for their brothers and sisters.

"I also need to set an example for my little brothers. They need to see good examples in the home," said Latoya McClung, a ninth grader. "I feel like I am a role model for them now."

The program does not reach all students. Carey Spears, Greenwood High principal, explains, "Some students are so hard core, nothing matters. Many are right out of reform school. They're on house arrest for drugs, shooting, breaking and entering."

Although the drop-out rate for MMAP participants is difficult to measure because these students are a highly transient population, anecdotal evidence suggests that gains are being made. Thomas Mattox, director of Greenwood's Alternative School, says: "Forty-seven tenth-graders participated in the program in 1994-95; 35 of them are now eleventh-graders at the vocational school, while another six repeated grade 10. Many of these kids wouldn't be in school now if it weren't for the program."

"Many of these kids wouldn't be in school now if it weren't for the program."

MMAP tutors and mentors get high marks. They are reliable, empathetic, committed and are making a significant impact on the at-risk students they serve. "The mentors and tutors can sometimes reach kids we can't as teachers," said teacher Sharon Jackson.

The program benefits from the dedication and commitment of administrators and students, and from their adherence to the program's guiding principle, that education is the key to positive and necessary changes in the Mississippi Delta.

"If we can get more of these students to graduate high school and a few to go on to college, we create more productive citizens. There will be fewer people on welfare and in jail," says one principal.

While the percentage varies widely depending on the school, more than 50 percent of the MMAP participants are enrolled in college preparatory courses. For middle and elementary school students, MMAP participation does increase enrollment in college preparatory courses, according to MMAP project managers. All indications are that MMAP will increase the number of at-risk minority students entering college, but it is too early to measure the change in college matriculation rate.

REPLICATION

MMAP has the potential to significantly improve the lives of students in the Mississippi Delta and elsewhere. The basic structure of MMAP can be successfully exported to other schools and communities nationwide. Role model programs, especially those that enlist African Americans to mentor younger, at-risk students, increase opportunities for this sector of the population. These programs can help motivate at-risk students to graduate from high school and pursue post-secondary training and schooling.

Although many MMAP components can be replicated elsewhere around the country, each particular program must be tailored to fit the needs, barriers and resources of the community and schools it serves.

While MMAP is successful, changes could be made to boost its impact and improve its performance. These recommendations apply to any efforts to replicate the program.

1. Consider the inclusion of at-risk students of both genders. The name Minority Male Afterschool Program is a misnomer. Although all participants are African American, they are not members of minority populations in their schools, where nearly 100 percent of the students are African American. The program serves students during school hours and not after school and is not exclusively for males — about 20 percent of the participants are female. Thomas Mattox, director of Greenwood's Alternative School, said one of the program's strengths at his school was its inclusion of female students. While African-American males are at high risk, organizers of mentoring programs should consider including students of both sexes. It's a testament to the program's success that female students want to participate.

"The basic structure of MMAP can be successfully exported to other schools and communities nationwide."

2. Start reaching students before their teen-age years. Jennifer Beane believes that fourth grade would be a good time to start. "Their minds are not made up yet. They haven't been pulled by the crowd. It's still okay to obey your parents. Opinions haven't been shaped. We

can still change attitudes." Offer early awareness programs in elementary schools, which introduce these younger students to college and different careers. Bring in high school students to tutor the younger students and act as role models to them. By serving in this new role, high school students pressure themselves to excel. "They gave me a sense of respect for myself," says Marzelle Wallace, one of MMAP's exemplary tutors. "I realized, if someone is watching me, I should demonstrate a correct example. How could I tell them to get good grades if I wasn't getting good grades? How could I tell them to go to class if I wasn't going to class? Being a mentor helped keep me on top of things."

3. Communicate and promote the program to the community. Publicize the inception of the program and update community members regularly about its progress. Place articles in community newspapers and through radio, television and other media educate all members of the community about the program. Media coverage fosters awareness and enhances the enthusiasm of participants.

4. Articulate the program's goals and format clearly and extensively to its constituents. Everyone at the schools — students, faculty, staff, administration — should be aware of the program and understand how it works. Use faculty meetings, student assemblies, newsletters and bulletin boards to communicate events and share successes.

5. Garner support from a broad base of teachers, parents, community members, religious organizations, social service agencies and businesses. Partnerships with businesses, cooperation from teachers, and the sharing of responsibility with caregivers are all fundamental to the success of mentoring programs like MMAP. For MMAP or similar programs to have maximum impact, they must harness the support and resources of others in the community in trying to raise the aspirations and provide greater opportunity for some of the at-risk population. Collaboration can help programs like this succeed. Community members can be mentors, role models, speakers. They can provide much needed resources and energy.

"Partnerships with businesses, cooperation from teachers, and the sharing of responsibility with caregivers are all fundamental to the success of mentoring programs like MMAP."

6. Create an active and involved advisory board. The advisory board needs to meet regularly and play a role in building awareness of and support for the mentoring program. Charles Scott, Leflore principal, says that what MMAP needs most is "leaders with influence over the community and more resources." A successful advisory board will provide both, helping develop relationships with businesses and com-

munity groups and providing a perspective and new ideas to these programs. Select board members whose talents and connections can fulfill specific needs, such as aiding in business collaborations, fund raising and public relations.

7. Involve parents and family members in programming. Parents need to be involved in their children's education. Invite parents to events and activities that encourage them to get involved. Holding parenting and financial aid workshops, awards dinners and so on makes parents more active participants in the educational process. Develop a core group of parents and rely on them to network and get other parents involved. Ask parents for the most convenient place and time for meetings. Instead of meeting in the school on a weekday evening, it might be more convenient and comfortable for your parents to meet in a church on a Saturday morning.

8. Expand the program to introduce students to college. Arrange visits to college campuses, offering tours of the facilities and meals in the dining halls. Show students the libraries, the dormitories, the football stadium. Invite the parents of the students to join in these visits. Arrange for the college admissions staff to do workshops on college admissions and financial aid, inviting parents to how-to-finance-college seminars. Involve college faculty in the program, by asking them to speak to the students, give classes, explain career paths. These college awareness efforts should start with students in elementary and middle schools.

9. Evaluate the program. Set clear objectives, outline strategies to meet these objectives and determine how to measure whether objectives are being met. Also, limit the number of objectives and make sure they fit the program. If parent involvement is an objective, for example, then keep track of attendance at parent meetings. The program needs to keep good statistics and track them as a way of evaluating success. Continually tracking the program can help staff determine whether the program is on course and moving toward goals.

CONCLUSION

"Whatever you want to do, you can do it. The more you give to society, the more society gives to you," said Marzelle Wallace.

Mentoring programs like the Minority Male Afterschool Program can change lives. They can turn a high school student preoccupied with drugs and gangs into a college student pursuing good grades and a fulfilling career. They give college students the opportunity to help others while enriching their own experience.

Programs like the Minority Male Afterschool Program are not the only solution — they cannot single-handedly keep kids out of prison and off the welfare rolls. The obstacles facing many of America's schools and students are overwhelming. But programs like these make a difference, and they challenge us to find other answers.

Most important, mentoring programs stress the importance of, as Rev. Mitchell said, "breaking the cycle." They understand the need to raise the educational aspirations of all students. The more positive messages students receive — the more they are told they are capable of succeeding — the more likely they are to accept that, and work harder.

"Programs like these make a difference, and they challenge us to find other answers."

"The calamity of life is not reaching your goals," said Rev. Lewis at the MMAP conference. "The calamity of life is having no goals to reach."

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Herbert F. (Rick) Dalton, Jr. directs the Foundation for Excellent Schools (FES) -- a non-profit foundation that has helped more than 100 schools develop and implement plans to raise student aspirations and improve learning opportunities. Prior to founding FES in 1991, Rick was Director of Enrollment Planning at Middlebury College, where he helped establish the DeWitt Clinton High School-Middlebury Partnership that now serves as a protype for the Consortium for Educational Excellence through Partnerships (CEEP). Founded through support from Plan for Social Excellence, CEEP is an alliance of 110 schools and colleges that has served more than 115,000 K-16 students and faculty.